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Editorial: Thanks for not signing

The Obama administration currently is working with the United Kingdom, Russia, China, France and Germany on a sensitive nuclear deal with Iran. The deadline for such a compact is March 31. Time is of the essence, and the stakes couldn't be higher.

So, when Tom Cotton, Arkansas' junior senator, used his 65th day in office to issue a direct letter to Iranian leaders March 9, his breach of the Constitution and general protocol made waves throughout the world.

The letter outlines a scenario in which any future hypothetical Republican administration would basically void an agreement reached by President Obama. Even more surprising than the letter's existence is the fact it was co-signed by 46 other senators, all of them Republicans.

For Indiana's part, it was clear Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly wouldn't have signed such a deal. What is commendable was the fact Republican Sen. Dan Coats was not one of the 47 senators to add their names to this correspondence. Coats has placed the sanctity of separation of powers over petty partisanship in the pursuit of such a compact with Iran.

Cotton and his fellow signatories are trying to execute an end-run around executive power and force a military conflict with Iran. Cotton should be brought up on charges for such reckless misbehavior.

“Any citizen of the United States, wherever he may be, who, without authority of the United States, directly or indirectly commences or carries on any correspondence or intercourse with any foreign government or any officer or agent thereof, with intent to influence the measures or conduct of any foreign government or of any officer or agent thereof, in relation to any disputes or controversies with the United States, or to defeat the measures of the United States, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than three years, or both,” reads the Logan Act, a federal law enacted Jan. 30, 1799.

Beyond being illegal, this letter also violated every known precept of how Washington should work.

“The U.S. Senate Historian’s Office has so far been unable to find another example in the chamber’s history where one political party openly tried to deal with a foreign power against a presidential policy,” reported McClatchy’s David Goldstein March 10.

We take our hats off to Coats for his prudence. What would Cotton and his fellow signing Republicans say if the situation were reversed? Perhaps

Cotton should spend a bit more time learning about our own government before he lectures foreign leaders about its intricacies.